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House of Representatives

Supporting H. Res. 354 Condemning the Attack on Protesters Outside the Turkish Ambassador's Residence

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support H. Res. 354, condemning the violence perpetrated against peaceful protesters outside the Turkish Ambassador's residence during Turkish President Erdogan's visit last month. This timely and critically important measure was introduced by my good friend, and Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman, ED ROYCE.

Mr. Speaker, as representatives of the American people, we take a solemn oath to "support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic." This sworn commitment spurs us to speak out now after the violent attack last month on peaceful protesters in Washington, D.C. who were peacefully exercising their First Amendments rights.

On that day a group of peaceful demonstrators—including a resident from my home state of New Jersey, Ceren Borazan—gathered outside the Turkish Ambassador's residence to protest the policies of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Shortly after President Erdogan's arrival at the residence during his official visit to the United States, a contingent of his

security guards, joined by some supporters, rushed across the street where the protesters were gathered. Before the demonstrators knew it, this group of thugs was upon them, throwing them to the ground and raining blows upon them.

By now we are all familiar with the shocking video images captured of men in dark suits, some with guns, and others in plainclothes mercilessly kicking protesters in their faces while they lie helplessly on the ground. Some demonstrators were outnumbered four to one by their assailants who punched and manhandled them until DC police intervened. When police stepped in, some attackers turned to assault our uniformed officers.

Among this group of protesters were Kurdish- and Armenian-Americans, members of minorities with a painful history of persecution and marginalization in their ancestral homelands. These individuals came to the United States to seek the freedom and safety they were deprived in their lands of origin.

The United States and its Bill of Rights are a promise to these people that must not be broken. That members of the President's security detail and others felt they could attack these sacred rights with impunity should offend us all. That Erdogan would calmly watch the melee unfold—as video evidence shows— is as galling as it is unsurprising. Indeed, just a year ago his security detail was involved in an all-too-similar incident at a public event in Washington.

Mr. Speaker, the steps recommended by this measure should be urgently implemented. Among other things, the United States

should charge and prosecute all those involved in the attack. The State Department should request a waiver of immunity for any Turkish officials charged and detained in connection with the incident. Finally, the United States should redouble its efforts to promote democracy and human rights in Turkey.

Mr. Speaker, this was a brutal physical assault on a group of peaceful demonstrators in our nation's capital and a brazen insult to all Americans. I urge my colleagues in the House of Representatives to join their voices and votes in strongly condemning this incident and calling for justice.